



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Government of Ontario to Reduce Waitlists and Improve Autism Services

**Families of children on the autism spectrum will have mixed feelings about yesterday's announcement.**

It is our hope that the March 29, 2016 announcement from the Ministry of Child and Youth Services will begin to further define the Government of Ontario's plans to invest **\$333 million over five years for autism services**. Autism Ontario hopes that it will mark a significant and positive milestone in both public policy and practice for the effective intervention of children and youth on the autism spectrum in Ontario.

Autism Ontario commends the ASD Clinical Expert Committee for their work in its [report](#) that contains a review of the literature on early intervention in ASD, and in listening not only to researchers and clinicians, but to Ontario parents of children with ASD, who live with the daily joys and anxieties in attempting to realize the potential in the children they love and support. We're grateful for the committee's well-articulated insights and recommendations in their report to the Government of Ontario.

"I was very happy to hear about the new Ontario Autism Program and the funds to go along with it. I have experienced patience, compassion and genuine concern from the hard-working individuals who help parents navigate the system everyday but more can always be done to ensure families receive the expedited services they need for their children. This news is highly encouraging but more importantly, immensely needed." Marieta Mendoza, parent

While we have received positive feedback like Marieta's for the move towards Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI), many families and service providers are concerned about the transition plan to move families towards the new Ontario Autism Program and how this transition will impact current children over age five.

Families with children older than 5 are experiencing mixed feelings about the announcement. "While I'm happy that the province is recognizing the need to shorten the unreasonable wait time, I wish the same emphasis would be placed on the growing adult autistic population, who are in desperate need of funding, programs and housing. People with autism are only

'children' for 18 years Where are they to go, and what are they to do, for the rest of their lives?" says parent Sue Walters.

For parents who are seeing early signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder or whose very young children have been diagnosed, news of a **clear plan to significantly reduce waiting times for assessment and effective intervention for their young ones**. This is very good news. For those families caught in the transition, this time period may feel heartbreakin and uncertain.

**To learn more about the changes made to the Ontario Autism Program, visit [Ontario.ca/autism](http://Ontario.ca/autism)**

Public policy surrounding autism intervention over the past two decades has been a winding and sometimes rocky road for parents. For some, without substantial financial means, there simply was no path forward that would help them get the intervention and supports their child with autism needed to learn and grow.

"Families today can give credit to the parents who have been continually advocating on behalf of the thousands of people with autism and their families for many years about the importance of investment into timely, early, evidence-based intervention, even at a time when they and their children were or would not be eligible for the intervention services announced today."

Marg Spoelstra, Executive Director, Autism Ontario

Have we found the solution to meeting the needs of all families with loved ones on the spectrum? No, not yet, and even though the announcement is bittersweet, the encouraging news is that Ontario has taken a big step in moving in the right direction - one more aligned with evidence. Now if we can do that in Ontario for school aged children and adults with ASD, while removing barriers to supports, then Ontarians on the autism spectrum will be able to take their place as full, participating citizens. This would also ease parents' anxiety about their own aging and fear for their adult children's future.

If you are a parent with questions about the new children's autism services, **stay tuned for details regarding online information sessions hosted by the Province of Ontario** in partnership with Autism Ontario. We will be announcing details through our communication channels shortly.

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**About Autism Ontario:**

Autism Ontario is the province's largest collective voice representing the autism community, made up of knowledgeable parents and professionals who can speak to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) issues across Ontario. We are dedicated to providing ASD information and education, supporting research, and advocating for programs and services. We work to increase public awareness about autism and the day-to-day issues faced by people with autism, their families, and the professionals with whom they interact.

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